

Although Article 23 of the Nigerien constitution guarantees the rights to freedom of thought, opinion, and expression, these were inconsistently implemented in 2014. Despite a spate of arrests early in the year, journalists faced fewer attacks while covering the news.

Legal Environment

In 2010, the postcoup transitional government decriminalized media offenses and replaced prison sentences with fines as punishments for defamation and publication of false information. In 2011, President Mahamadou Issoufou became the first head of state to sign the Declaration of Table Mountain, an initiative calling for the repeal of criminal defamation and insult laws and for a press environment in Africa that is free from government, political, and economic control. However, journalists are occasionally subject to legal action. Nine journalists were detained on various charges in January and February 2014. Soumana Idrissa Maiga, editor of *l'Enquêteur*, was arrested in January for “threatening national security” via his column, which alleged that “the ruling party’s days in power were numbered.” Later that month, *Radio Television Bonferey* host Abdoulaye Mamane, television host Zakari Adamou, and *L’Union* editor Ousmane Dan Badji were arrested separately after each allegedly accused Issoufou of corruption. All four were released by the end of the month, though Dan Badji was tried in April and fined for defamation of the president. Justice Minister Marou Amadou justified the detentions under Niger’s penal code and stated the government would not tolerate “calls to insurrection, hatred, or a coup.” Other charges against journalists included conspiracy and failing to report a possible coup to authorities; some received fines or suspended sentences.

In 2011, the transitional government approved the Charter on Access to Public Information and Administrative Documents, which aimed to improve transparency and public access to information. Implementation of the law remains inadequate, and in practice access is somewhat difficult.

While the state-run media regulatory body, the High Council on Communication, issues warnings to media with antigovernment content, it does the same to progovernment media that fail to provide coverage of regime critics.

Political Environment

On November 30, 2014, the government announced the first official National Day of Press Freedom. Issoufou declared the Nigerien government would robustly support a free press and cited the establishment of the press day as proof of this commitment.

Official censorship generally does not take place in either the traditional or online media, though the High Commission for New Technology and Communication ordered the blocking of terrorist group websites in 2014. Self-censorship stems from the authorities’ use of intimidation or advertising incentives to shape content. Government critics receive little coverage in public media.

Despite the detentions early in the year, private media coverage throughout 2014 criticized the government and discussed official scandals. For example, *Le Monde D’Aujourd’hui* ran stories accusing the Issoufou government of lies and corruption. Media also covered revelations that Niger’s minister of agriculture and

speaker of the parliament were among a group of individuals suspected of involvement in an international infant trafficking ring. The minister and speaker claimed the charges were politically motivated, while the prosecutor argued they were substantiated. Media outlets presented both sides of the case, which was ongoing at year's end. No physical attacks or threats against members of the media were reported in 2014.

Economic Environment

Several dozen private newspapers compete with a state-run daily. Radio remains the most popular and widely accessible news source. The state continues to dominate the broadcasting landscape, though a number of private radio stations and dozens of community radio stations broadcast in French and local languages. Some stations air programming from foreign services, including Voice of America, Deutsche Welle, BBC, and Radio France Internationale. On television, three private stations operate alongside two state-run stations.

A heavy tax on private media hinders development of the private media sector, and public media receive the bulk of advertising from state-owned companies. In 2013, all eligible private media received support funds from the Fund for the Aid of the Press, with the stated aim of encouraging the public service and democracy promotion functions of the press. At the end of 2014, President Issoufou announced a 25 percent increase for the fund. Considerable economic uncertainty has contributed to corruption within the media sector, leading to unethical behavior by journalists that can affect the quality and accuracy of reporting.

Online speech is generally free, but internet access remained very sparse, reaching less than 2 percent of the population in 2014.